

Kings and Prophets 15-04-03a

This is Friday, the 3rd of April, 2015. We continue our study of kings and prophets tonight, and you can be thumbing your way through the Old Testament to find the book of Micah. This is our fourth prophet of the 8th century prophets in the days of Jeroboam II in the north, Jotham and company in the south, and this will complete the set of four that we're looking at in the context of that historical setting.

We'll take a moment, as is our custom, to pause and go before the Lord in prayer, cultivate the environment in our souls where God the Holy Spirit can be most effective, can accomplish the teaching that is His exclusive domain. We can't learn, I can't teach, we can't make any progress in our understanding of God's Word without His essential and vital ministry. So we take this opportunity to remember that and to thank the Lord for His many other expressions of grace at this time.

Father, what a blessing it is, what a privilege to be acquainted with and have fellowship with and a bond of Christian brotherhood with fellow believers in the Lord Jesus who are not only saved by Your grace but share an enthusiasm and an appreciation for Your plan and purpose as it is revealed in the pages of Scripture and most fully in the Lord Jesus Himself. We thank You for this opportunity to spend time together seeking to gain a better understanding of Your Word, especially this portion in the Old Testament where the prophetic message is being delivered to Your people in the northern and southern kingdoms, and we know that these messages are pertinent and meaningful for us as well. And we pray Your blessing on us as we take a look at this particular portion that Your Holy Spirit will minister it to each heart, bless each one, encourage, strengthen, and uplift each heart as we endeavor to draw closer to You through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we pray these things in His name, Amen. We began this series, we took a break in the narrative section of Kings and Chronicles denoting the events, characterizing the rather short dynastic reigns in the northern kingdom and the extended line of David in the southern kingdom. When we came to this period in the mid-700s B.C., circa 750, 752, and down to 721, this is the last generation.

How long is a biblical generation? I know you know this, I'm just warming you up here, getting the wheels turning. How long is a biblical generation? Forty years. So from 721, you go out to 761, and we're in that last generation.

These are the people who have got to make the decision, are we going to wake up and smell the burning fig tree or not? And so God having, as they like to say now, reached out. I don't understand, well never mind, I don't want to go down that road. I don't understand why reach out has become a synonym for call, talk to, convey a message.

I just wanted to reach out. People call me on the phone selling all things from siding to

whatever else. And see I started to say suppositories, I thought that's just not appropriate for Bible class.

So not from siding to suppositories, I'm not going to say that. But they call up selling all kinds of things, and they say, I just wanted to reach out, just wanted to reach out to you. They're not reaching, I don't want people reaching out to me, that's creepy.

It's like a zombie movie. Anyway, so as I started to say before I deflected myself, God was reaching out to his people Israel, and I can say that biblically, what's my reference? All day long God says I have done what? Say it out loud, all day long God says I have done what? Held out my hands, that's reaching out. I've held out my hands to whom? A disobedient and stiff-necked people.

You remember years ago we did that study on stiff-necked, wasn't that interesting? That's people who show the neck. Remember? It's not stiff, it's showing the neck. How is it you show somebody your neck? You turn around, and you're walking away, and you've got your head bowed in rebellion.

And so you're showing the neck. All day long I've held out my hands to people who are like the swine Jesus talked about, that you try to throw the pearls at, and he says don't throw your pearls before swine, because they will turn and tear you to pieces. Why do they turn? Because they're moving away, just like the stiff-necked.

So God is literally here in the spiritual sense, I guess that's not literal except spiritually, reaching out to his people, and he's done it with four different writing prophets. He has already done it in many other ways. You remember when things started going radically downhill was when the kingdom divided, right? And you have ten northern tribes, you have two southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin, who are ruled from Jerusalem, and then the northern kingdom, the original Jeroboam, establishes his hegemony up north.

And eventually there is the development of the capital city of Samaria, and so you have Samaria as the capital in the north, and Jerusalem as the capital in the south. And right away there is a division, sort of a sheep and goats division, where you've got the more faithful, the ones that God chooses to keep the line of David operating to care for and to seek to rule. And then in the north you've got the ones who very quickly turn to the golden calves, and Dan and Bethel, and they quickly embrace idolatry and a very perverse and corrupted form of worship of God.

They still use his name, kind of like at the foot of Mount Sinai with Aaron making the golden calf, this is the God that brought you out of Israel. Now, this is a big warning sign. This entire section of the Bible is a warning, don't be fooled when something has the name of God on it.

That doesn't make it godly. Worship in the northern kingdom had the name of God all over it, but it was golden calf worship. It was idolatry masquerading as respect for and attention to God and his covenant, and it wasn't.

It was deceptive. And deception characterizes false worship going all the way back to Eve picking the fruit off the tree, hath God not said, and it's a deception. I'm giving you a slightly perverted and twisted version of the word of God that causes you to accomplish the will of Satan instead of the will of God.

Satan's not going to send Anton LaVey to your doorstep with a satanic Bible and say, come on now, let's sin together. What's he going to use? Corrupted, perverted truth, slightly skewed, out of level, out of balance, off center, some of the wiring unplugged, and twisted truth is far more effective in deflecting the people of God than is an outright lie. Satan didn't come and sell a big parcel of swampland to Eve.

He gave her almost complete truth and then used that to turn her. Well, that's what has happened in the northern kingdom. So what did God do? Did God sit idly by, let His people go off the narrow road and into darkness and say nothing? What has God done from the beginning? In the northern kingdom, He has sent prophet after prophet, after man of God, after man of God.

You remember the original Jeroboam got confronted by a man of God, did he not? And was there not supernatural, miraculous intervention by God, withering the king's arm, breaking down the altar, the man of God that is deflected by the other man of God saying I am giving you God's additional word? He didn't say, you know, the devil sent me to deflect you off your path. What did the old man of God say to the young man of God that was up there doing God's mission? I have a word from the Lord that says it's okay for you to turn aside and stay with me. You remember that? Well, it's metaphorical, it's emblematic, it pictures what is happening in the north.

And from the beginning of the divided kingdom, God has made appeal after appeal, after intervention after intervention, and sent message after message up there to try to turn those people back and has been taking dramatic forms like Mount Carmel, with Elijah, with the drought, with deliverance in times of crisis. He's done everything you can think of. Well, and then in this final century for the northern kingdom, he sends these prophets whose messages we have in writing.

And we've looked at them. Do you remember the first three? In no particular order, we had Jonah, we had Hosea, and we had Amos. And that's not quite in chronological order.

Chronologically, Jonah was probably the earliest, probably followed by Amos, probably followed by Hosea, then probably followed by our prophet tonight, Micah. But the chronology is not given any attention in the Old Testament because that's not what is important. The time is important, and these books tell us their historical framework, and so that's where we have placed them.

Well, I'm going to offer something that I wouldn't die for. I don't think that it's a strong biblical... I don't think that God necessarily intended for us to pick up on this and have it as a part of our

fundamental understanding. But this is more of a helpful suggestion in terms of remembering these four prophets.

Because very quickly, if you're like me, time is going to pass, we're going to move on, we're going to get on down the trail, 721 is going to come, northern kingdom is going to go out, we're going to be looking at the prophets who are ministering to the southern kingdom, we're going to be ultimately looking at Jeremiah and reviewing Isaiah, and they're talking to the people in Judah because the northern kingdom is gone. And then pretty soon, months will go by, and you'll go back and say, well, you know, we covered Hosea, I remember something about Gomer, we covered Amos, I remember he was Tekoa's shepherd, Jonah, of course, big fish, worm in the gourd, and that's about it. Well, it would be nice if we could remember a little bit more about these.

So what I'm offering you now, I'm not saying this is an essential biblical understanding so much as it's, to me, kind of a helpful memory aid. Because it occurs to me that this, for the people in the northern kingdom, is the last appeal from God that they are going to get until New Testament days. Right? There's not going to be much going on in the realm that will be called Samaria until the days of the Lord Jesus, when He goes to the woman at the well, and He needs to go through Samaria, and He tells the story of the Good Samaritan, and there's a fresh opportunity in that area.

Well, that fresh opportunity, in the days of the Lord Jesus, is detailed to us in the four biblical gospels, which, in the proper God-given order, in my mind, ought to be, I think our New Testament, I've said this many times, I think our New Testament was put together by Catholics, and I think they goofed it. The New Testament ought to be John, Mark, Matthew, Luke. That's what I think.

If I was building a Bible, if you were going to get the Sam Hall Study Bible, that's the order that the gospels would be in. John, Mark, Matthew, Luke. Here's why.

What are the first words of the Old Testament? In the beginning. What are the first words of the gospel of John? In the beginning. So, why wouldn't you start the New Testament the same way God started the Old Testament? In the beginning.

And go back to that time before time when God, in His heaven, set out the plan. You've got the plan of creation in the Old Testament, you've got the plan of salvation in the New Testament. It's just, how they missed that, I don't know.

But John, quite obviously, ought to be the first gospel in my mind. Followed by Mark, because it is the earliest, sort of the archetypal account, from the lips of Peter, of what took place during the ministry of the Lord. And Matthew and Luke are both clearly dependent upon Mark to form the backbone and skeleton for their gospels.

But then each of them fleshes that out under God's inspiration for specific purposes. And why

would I put Matthew ahead of Luke? Who does the gospel come to first? The Jews. And Matthew casts that gospel account, in terms of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, to the people of Israel.

The Jewish church gets the gospel of Matthew. What's great about the gospel of Luke? Who wrote it? Luke, the beloved physician. He's a Gentile.

And he broadens the scope and foreshadows the spread of the gospel. Plus, what a nice transition, because what is your next book in the New Testament? Volume 2 of Luke. Luke, Volume 1. Luke, Volume 2. So, all in favor of reordering.

That's my sales pitch. So anyway, the reason I bring up the gospels, how many of them are there? You can say it out loud. Four.

It's not a trick question. Four gospels, right? You've got John, Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Now, what has been understood since ancient times about those gospels, in terms of their thematic message? Don't you have kind of a little memory aid, where you say, well, Matthew is the gospel that presents the Messiah.

You know, Luke presents him as the great physician. There's the humanity of Christ and the deity of Christ. You remember that? And if you go and look at even the ancient church, they've assigned symbols to those gospels that correspond to the four faces of the Cherub.

Remember that? So, Matthew has the face that variously is either human or angelic. The face of an angel and the face of a man are pretty much the same. But in the Old Testament accounts, the four faces that surround the throne of God, the Cherubim have four faces.

And as you look at the throne of God, you can see three of them at any given time. And you remember those faces? What are the faces? There's a face like a man, a human face. There's a lion.

There's an ox. Remember the ox? The whole burnt offering idea, the burden bearer. And then there's the eagle.

And you remember the significance of those. The human, of course, humanity, lion, the rulership, the lion of the tribe of Judah idea, the kingship, the messiahship. You've got Luke representing the ox, the burden bearer, the physician.

He took our infirmities and our diseases upon himself, bore them in our... You know, he harking back. And then the deity of Christ. You know, you have the humanity of Christ and the deity of Christ in John.

And so those symbols and those faces reflect these four aspects. It's like a four-dimensional picture of the Lord Jesus. Well, I'm going to suggest to you that there is a helpful, if somewhat arbitrary, similarity in these four prophets that we're looking at in the 8th century.

Okay? I'm not saying that this is something God wove into the fabric. I'm saying that, for me, it's a helpful memory aid. And it has some traction.

But I wouldn't die for it. Don't go forth and say, well, Sam says that the four prophets in the 8th century are like the four gospels. They're kind of like the four gospels.

Okay? But it's helpful. It will help us remember more about these books, I think. So let me suggest to you, first of all, in the order that we covered them, we looked first at Jonah.

Right? The book of Jonah. Who's the main actor? Who's the protagonist in the book of Jonah? It's God. God's the star of the movie.

He's at the top of the building. God does everything. God tells Jonah to go.

Jonah won't go. God sends the storm. The sailors all recognize God.

And before God, they throw Jonah into the drink. Jonah goes down to the bottom of the sea. And with his head wrapped in seaweed, prays to God.

God delivers him. God speaks to the fish. And he gets herped out onto the land.

God says, Jonah, how come you're not going to Nineveh? He finally goes. Yet 40 days in Nineveh will be destroyed. Who's going to do the destroying? God, not Jonah.

Jonah doesn't come like Paul Bunyan with an axe on his shoulder. Yet 40 days, I'm going to chop this city down. It's God.

God is the actor. God is the protagonist in the book of Jonah. And what is the theme, if you will? What's going on? What's the message? Why did God put Jonah in front of his people in the 8th century? Here's God with a plan and a purpose.

Here's Jonah with his own plan and his own purpose. And he's recalcitrant. He's unappreciative.

He's disobedient. God tells him to go one way, and he goes another. When God does what God has promised to do, when God expresses his grace, Jonah gets unhappy about it.

Jonah majors in the minors. So if I was one way, one of many ways you could sum up the book of Jonah, Jonah is objectivity versus subjectivity. Divine viewpoint versus human viewpoint.

God versus Jonah. Provision versus I really wanted to see these Gentiles get judged. It foreshadows many things.

Jonah is New Testament Judaism booing at God's grace to the Gentiles, right? It has all of that going on in it. It's an overview. It's a big picture of what God is doing, and it tries to communicate that picture to the people of Israel.

So in that sense, I would assign it of the four faces of the cherubim, I would assign it the face of

the eagle. This is God. This is deity at work.

God's plan. God's purpose. God's overarching authority.

And man's response or rejection of it. But it's sweeping. It comprehends Israel into the man Jonah.

It comprehends the Gentiles of history into, especially forward-looking history, into Nineveh. It comprehends God's mercy and God's salvation and people's reaction to it. It's big picture.

It's an eagle-eye view of the landscape. And it's very metaphorical. It's very symbolic, if you will.

There's not a lot of didactic preaching in it. You don't have woe songs. You don't have a lot of predictions of what God's going to do to his people, promises of deliverance.

It's a parable in that sense. Okay? So let's just arbitrarily say we're going to assign the eagle and that objectivity, subjectivity, big picture view to Jonah. Kind of like the Gospel of John.

It goes back to the beginning of time. It looks forward to the end of time. These things are written that you might believe.

These things, these stories of Jesus, these seven signs that he performs in the Gospel of John. And you have those episodes in the life of Jonah that speak of bigger, grander things. That's Jonah.

Second book we looked at was? Hosea. Yeshua. Right? By the way, what does Yonah mean? Something with wings.

The dove. Bird of the air. Right? And where does Jonah end up? Flying high or sinking low? Jonah ends up as far from the eagles as you can get.

He's down below the whale droppings. So that's the contrast. That's why I like that figure for Jonah.

You've got the idea of wings. You've got God in heaven. You've got Jonah at the bottom of the drink.

It's classic. The second one is Hosea. Yeshua.

And what does Hosea's message introduce by way of a paradigm? By way of a format for the message? What's the first thing you think of when you think of the book of Hosea? He marries the harlot, Gomer. And has kids. And they have names.

And it's all about relationship. It's about covenant relationship. Marriage is a covenant.

And there are implications of loyalty and fidelity and dedication and commitment in that. Right? It is the relationship that is put forward. And God's message to his people in Hosea is, You are

in breach of the covenant.

You have broken faith. I am willing to take you back in the same way that I am having my prophet take back his prostitudinal wife. And that's the picture.

And what do we believe about the definition of marriage? Marriage is a covenant between who? A man and a woman. The man pictures God in the same way that Christ and the church represent the groom and the bride. Right? The man and the woman.

And so this is a man-oriented. The book of Hosea begins with this man and his marriage. And his covenant relationship problems.

And God puts that for God and his people and the covenant relationship problems. So what face do you think I'm going to assign to the book of Hosea? The man face. Which is also the angel face.

The angels are the unfallen. Those who have kept covenant. Those who are in heaven serving God loyally and faithfully.

Like Gabriel and Michael. And look at the difference between men and angels. Look at the difference between those.

What did Jesus pray? Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Who's doing the will of God in heaven? The angels. Who's not doing the will of God on earth? Men.

So that double face and the relationship covenant responsibilities. That are so clearly delineated and decried for failure in Hosea. I think this is a helpful memory aid for that book.

Third book we just finished studying. In its glorious nine chapter fullness was Amos. Where is Amos from? He's from Judah.

He's from Tekoa. He's a keeper of the sheep. Not in the lowly servant boy David sense.

In the industrial we are husbanding and preparing these special sheep. That are going to go to Jerusalem. And picture the ultimate capital L Lamb of God.

And he's not a prophet by trade. He is a person charged with fruitfulness. And the book of Amos.

His name Amos means burden. Or burden bearer. Now of the four cherub faces.

Which one would you pick as a burden bearer? The ox. What is the ox in the Old Testament? What does he signify in the ancient near east? He's the tractor. He's the John Deere that you produce fruitfulness with.

You have herds. And you plow your fields with a yoke of oxen. What does Elijah find Elisha doing? Remember that? When Elijah goes to get Elisha.

And call him to full time followership. What is Elisha doing? You remember? He is plowing with yokes of oxen. Remember he busts up the yokes.

And makes a sacrifice out of his yoke of oxen. Elishua. My God is the Lord.

My God saves. Elishua. Elisha.

He's got that Yeshua element even in his name. And he's plowing. And Amos is the agriculture guy.

Both figs and animals. He is a herdsman and a sheep man. In the large industrial.

He is to animals what Peter, James, and John were to fish. Peter, James, and John weren't out there as servant fishermen. They had a fishing industry.

They were owners of a very profitable business. Remember they often. That business kept going while they were following the Lord.

They had underlings. They had nephews or sons or whoever. Servants who kept that business going while they followed the Lord.

And the business continued. Well that's Amos. So the theme.

Let's review real quick. What's the theme of Jonah? What's the big idea there? It's the big picture. It's the overview.

This is God in his dealings with his people. And it's objectivity versus subjectivity. God's view versus.

God can see that salvation is eventually going to come to the Gentiles. Jonah totally can't see that. God can see the necessity for Jonah to be a witness to those people.

Jonah cannot see it. Jonah doesn't feel like being obedient. Because he can't wrap his mind around the plan and purpose of God.

Objectivity, subjectivity, big picture. Looking at it from the eagle's point of view. Divine viewpoint versus human viewpoint.

That's Jonah. Number two was Hosea. What's Hosea about? Face of the man.

Relationship. Covenant. Obligation.

Commitment. Fidelity. Trust.

Faithfulness. Obedience. As we have been seeing in Ephesians recently with the authority structure that God has built in.

That's Hosea. Hosea. Yeshua.

Then the third one, Amos. Burden bearer. Fruitfulness.

And God's purpose. God doesn't save us just to say, well look. Look at this big bunch I saved.

I'm kind of a saving God and here's a bunch that I saved. Any more than we would recruit and say, look at all these people I recruited. There's a purpose in it, right? What is the purpose in our salvation? What is the purpose in our relationship with God? Fruitfulness.

It is the will of God that you bear fruit and that your fruit should remain. I am the vine. You are the branches.

Abide in me and do what? Abide in me and do what? Bear fruit. John chapter 15, right? I am the vine. You are the branches.

It's the will of my Father that you be fruitful. And if you start bearing fruit, my Father's going to prune you so that you will bear more fruit. If you're an unfruitful branch, you're going to be pruned off and out.

You're going to be like those branches of Romans chapter 9 and 10 and 11 that are broken out. So that others can be grafted in to be fruitful. Amos is the fruitfulness.

The fruitful fig tree. Jesus curses the fig tree. Why? No fruit.

It doesn't matter what season it is. That tree, Jesus expected fruit and there was none. Fruitfulness.

So the ox. The agricultural farm tractor of the ancient world. The burden bearer.

The burden is born. This is the purpose. This is the objective.

Get stuff done. And that brings us to our fourth prophet tonight. And since we've already assigned somewhat arbitrarily the ox and the eagle and the human, what is the face that is left? The lion.

And our guy tonight is Micah. Micah. The lion.

And remember in Amos, at the beginning, when he said, he talked about lions roaring. And it was an introduction to the picture of judgment. God is roaring because he's got the prey and judgment is about to fall.

It's a warning. And you've got lions and sheep juxtaposed. What happens when you juxtapose lions and sheep? It's not like Daniel in the den, is it? It's more like, you know, young 22-year-old men at the table.

The food disappears. The prey is consumed. And that's going to be Micah.

Well, now that we've set the background and put Micah in his prophetic context in the 8th

century with his contemporaries, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll dig into this wonderful fourth 8th century prophet.